

And The Darkest Hour by pookiestheone

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Summary:

“And the darkest hour is just before dawn”

I took the chapter title from the Shirelles song “Dedicated to the One I Love”, although the phrase in one form or another is much older.

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And The Darkest Hour

Steve pulled open the hall closet and hung up his coat, reaching out to Billy so he could take his.

"Nice place." Billy commented as he looked around before kicking his shoes into a corner.

"Guess so."

"You got a pool too, right?" Billy asked as he tucked his shirt into his pants and ran his hands through his hair to fix it.

"Yeah." *How does he know this?*

"We had a pool in California. Well, we shared a pool. But then the ocean was minutes away so it didn't matter." He paused. "Bathroom?"

"Down here." Steve answered as he started down the hall. "Kitchen's this way too. I'll go make coffee."

Billy closed the bathroom door and stood looking at himself in the mirror. *Already made one mistake tonight bringing that bitch to the party, don't think I better try for two.* He remembered the kiss. *Or three.* He turned, unzipped and sighed as he felt the rush of relief.

Steve had been a thorn in his side from the minute he laid eyes on him, but not for the reason people would have imagined; he had dragged as much information as he could from anyone who knew him, not to gain an advantage, which he did of course, but because he held out the hope Steve might be interested. But he was hurt, damaged; a bitter, violent asshole, even worse since leaving California as Max liked to point out when they fought, who swaggered with a self-assurance he didn't feel. There was nothing for Steve to even like.

So he resorted to calling him pretty boy, King Steve, crowding him on the court, mocking him in the shower and the shameful fight that had gone too far, way too far. He convinced himself that Steve wouldn't

be worth caring about, but at the same time he made sure he didn't go unnoticed. The longer it went on the more of a disaster it became. Then tonight he acted on impulse without any idea what would happen. Nothing did, so he treated it like it was no big deal, like a joke.

He tucked himself in, zipped up and made some adjustments, then ran his hands under the water. As he entered the hallway he could hear Steve in the kitchen. *Why is this so damn hard?*

While Steve prepared the coffee he wondered where this was going. Billy was ... unusual; he'd seen that the first day he stepped out of his car. Jeans that tight and a chest that exposed, an earring, even the hair, wasn't Hawkins. He remembered a line from somewhere, a movie, a book, "He blew into town and the town was never the same." Corny, but Steve got the sense that Billy was that type of person, for good or bad. As it turned out it was more than just bad, which was unfortunate because that kiss tonight, although he had reacted defensively in surprise, might have been promising under other circumstances.

When Billy entered the kitchen he found Steve standing staring at the coffee maker on the breakfast bar as if willing it to finish. He looked up.

"Grab a stool. I put out milk and sugar because this stuff needs it as far as I'm concerned."

Billy sat down and spun the stool a couple of times, stopping by grabbing the edge of the counter.

"Where's your parents?"

"They went to some big hotel party in Indianapolis; tuxes and everything. Dad's got to network apparently and Mom goes where he does."

"Leaving you to fend for yourself."

Steve shrugged as he poured the coffee.

"Been doing it since I was eleven. Don't even think about it now."

How about you? Dad? Mom?”

He pulled up a stool opposite Billy.

“Dad and stepmom. No idea where they are tonight. Someone’s looking after Max so that’s all they care about.” He took a sip of his coffee. “Pretty good. Had something like this back home a couple of times.”

“California’s still home?”

“Would be if I had a choice.”

“What? And miss all the high life in Hawkins.”

“Hawkins is the asshole of the world.” Billy smiled. “No offense.”

Steve sat back in the stool, cradling his coffee against his chest with both hands.

“Can’t say you’re wrong. Although sometimes you run into someone interesting.”

“Thanks.”

“I wasn’t talking about you.”

“What?”

Steve burst out laughing. “You should have seen your face.”

“Nice one, Harrington, nice one.”

Steve set his mug down to refill it, holding the pot out to Billy as well.

“So, Billy, you want to tell me why this is happening?”

Billy nodded for him to pour some coffee.

“I was afraid you’d fall in a snowbank and freeze. Couldn’t have that on my conscience.”

"You know damn well that's not what I mean. You've been here since the summer and I can't remember when you weren't trying to fuck me over. You even tried to kill me." Billy started to interrupt him. "Yes, you did. And then tonight it was ... well, I don't know what it was."

"You were the one who said I was interesting."

"You're ignoring my question."

"I liked you better drunk and stumbling."

"Yeah, well a walk in the cold apparently does wonders for me. My question, Billy."

They ended up staring at each other, waiting for one of them to back down.

"Fine," Steve almost slammed down his mug. "I think you should go." He got up and walked toward the hall. "I'll get you your coat."

Billy followed him in silence to the front door, shoving his feet into his shoes, then catching his coat when Steve tossed it to him.

"See you around," Steve said as he opened the door.

Billy turned as he stepped outside. "Yeah, I ..."

Steve shut it in his face. "Goddam fucking jerk," he muttered as he reached to turn off the hall light.

A loud bang against the door made him jump.

"What, Billy? What?" he demanded as he threw it open.

"I like you, OK? I like you. Happy now? But if you fucking tell anyone I will kill you and no one will stop me this time."

"You like me?" Billy could hear the confusion. "Strange considering what's gone on between us, but there's no need to be so dram ... The kiss. You mean ... you actually **like** me."

Billy could feel his fists clench; it wouldn't be the first time he would have to fight someone over this. "And there it is." He turned on his heel and strode away.

"You better come inside."

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